Birth Control: The Shot (Depo-Provera®)

The birth control shot (Depo-Provera®) is given once every 11 to 13 weeks. The shot contains a small amount of progesterone similar to the hormones that are naturally made in a woman’s body. The shot prevents pregnancy by stopping the egg from being released from the ovary. The birth control shot also changes mucus at the cervix to keep sperm from reaching an egg.

Advantages of the shot

- More than 94 percent effective with typical use
- Lasts for 13 weeks at a time
- Lighter periods
- Periods may stop completely
- Lighter cramps
- May improve PMS (premenstrual syndrome)
- You can get the shot immediately after giving birth
- Safe with breastfeeding

Disadvantages of the shot

- You must go to the clinic every 11 to 13 weeks for the shot.
- You can get pregnant if you are late getting your shot or miss a shot.
- Possible side effects are weight gain and changes in your mood.
- Your periods will be irregular. In rare instances women may have more days of bleeding than before they started the shot.
- Some women may have a delay in getting pregnant after stopping the shot.

Risks

Decreased bone density: The shot may cause a drop in bone mineral density. The risk is highest for women less than 20 years of age. There is no proof that this causes broken bones. We recommend that young women using the shot eat three servings of dairy daily.
Who cannot get it

The birth control shot should not be used by women who:

- Have unexplained vaginal bleeding that they have not discussed with a health care provider
- Have a history of a stroke
- Diabetes with complications
- Lupus with antiphospholipid antibodies

Tell your health care provider if you have any of these risk factors or conditions, or any other medical concerns.

When to call the doctor

Call the doctor or health care provider right away if you:

- Think you are pregnant
- Think you might have a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- Are depressed or have a change in mood after starting the shot

Preventing STIs

The birth control shot does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Condoms are the best way for sexually active people to reduce the risk of infection. Always use a condom when you have sex. Get yearly health check-ups, including testing for STIs.